

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5118
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 0093

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: TECH, ENRG, AS
SUBJ: PRESS REACTION TO CONGRESSMAN HOSMER PRESS
CONFERENCE

REF: A. STATE 4388; B. CANBERRA 212; C. CANBERRA 174

SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 11, 1974 CONGRESSMAN CRAIG HOSMER MET A SELECT GROUP OF AUSTRALIAN PRESS, RADIO AND TV REPS IN THE USIS LIBRARY, SYDNEY. AFTER FAIRLY LONG OPENING REMARKS BY HOSMER, HE ACCEPTED QUESTIONS FIRST FROM PRESS AND LATER FROM TV REPS. CONFERENCE WAS GENERALLY FRIENDLY AND REFLECTED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST. UNFORTUNATELY, SUBSEQUENT EXTENSIVE PRESS REPORTAGE WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO HOSMER'S SUGGESTION THAT ATOMIC WASTE MATERIALS MIGHT BE STORED IN AUSTRALIA WHICH COULD BENEFIT BY SUBSEQUENT RE-PROCESSING AND RESALE.

1. IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE, JAN 11, CONGRESSMAN HOSMER OPENED WITH A GENERAL REVIEW OF U.S. EXPERIENCE IN THE ATOMIC ENERGY FIELD INCLUDING THE PROBLEMS OF THE VARIOUS FORMS OF ENRICHMENT AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF CONFIDENTIAL

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TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. HE POINTED OUT THAT WITH THE EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF FAST-BREEDER REACTORS AND OTHER SOPHISTICATED DEVELOPMENTS, THE USE OF NATURAL URANIUM AND ITS ENRICHED PRODUCT WOULD LAST

FOR 50 TO 60 YEARS DEPENDING ON HOW FAST WE MOVE INTO THE BREEDER TECHNOLOGY. HE EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF COORDINATION AMONG THE PRINCIPAL PRODUCERS, CANADA, SOUTH AFRICA, THE U.S., AND AUSTRALIA IN ORDER TO GEAR SUPPLY AND DEMAND, THEREBY PREVENTING EITHER A SHORTAGE OF ENRICHED FUEL OR A SURPLUS. HE PAID TRIBUTE TO THE CANADIANS AS BEING EXTREMELY SKILLED IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SALE OF URANIUM, CONTRASTING CANADA WITH SOUTH AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA WHOSE INTENTIONS HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT IN DOUBT. HOSMER STATED HIS MISSION IN AUSTRALIA IS NOT REPEAT NOT TO INFLUENCE AUSTRALIA'S DECISION, BUT TO INFORM HIMSELF ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S INTENTIONS. HE MENTIONED PLEASANT TALKS WITH MINISTER CONNOR AND OTHERS IN THE TREASURY AND FOREIGN OFFICE.

2. HOSMER BORE DOWN HARD ON THE POSSIBILITY OF TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS WHICH MIGHT IN A FEW YEARS RENDER EXISTING ENRICHMENT TECHNIQUES OBSOLETE, REDUCING THE DEMAND FOR ENRICHED URANIUM IN THE U.S. BY 46 PERCENT. HE MENTIONED THE USE OF THORIUM, AS WELL AS LASER ENRICHMENT WHICH WAS THE SUBJECT OF A SHORT ARTICLE WHICH WAS RELEASED IN WASHINGTON ON JAN 1* (REF A) AND WHICH HE HANDED OUT AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE. IN GENERAL HOSMER'S REMARKS WERE AN EXCEEDINGLY LUCID AND INTERESTING EXPOSITION OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE NUCLEAR ENERGY BUSINESS IN TERMS UNDERSTANDABLE TO A LAYMAN.

3. QUESTIONS WERE MAINLY CONCENTRATED ON (A) WHETHER HOSMER HAD SOUGHT TO PURSUADE THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT SOME PARTICULAR POLICY, AND (B) THE PROBLEM OF DISPOSAL OF RADIO ACTIVE WASTE. ON THE FIRST POINT, HOSMER CONSTANTLY EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAD NOT REPEAT NOT TRIED TO URGE THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT ANY PARTICULAR POLICY, THAT WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF BARGAINING WITH A COUNTRY OVER ITS POLICY, THAT HE EXPECTS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO ANNOUNCE ITS POLICY WHEN IT IS READY TO DO SO, AND THAT IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE
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FOR HIM TO ADVISE THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. HE MADE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR THAT HIS PURPOSE IN AUSTRALIA WAS ONLY TO INFORM HIMSELF ON THE THINKING OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT.

4. ON THE QUESTION OF WASTE, CONGRESSMAN HOSMER EXPLAINED LUCIDLY THE NATURE OF THE WASTE PROBLEM AND HOW IT HAS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD OVER ALL THE WORLD. HE QUOTED THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION AS DESCRIBING THE WASTE PROBLEM AS "THE BIGGEST NON-PROBLEM WE HAVE". HE LATER SAID THAT THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF WASTE THAT WILL BE PRODUCED IN THE U.S. FROM NOW UNTIL THE YEAR 2000 COULD BE PUT IN AN AMERICAN FOOTBALL FIELD FOUR FEET DEEP. LATER DURING QUESTIONS FROM T.V. HOSMER WAS ASKED, "WHERE WOULD YOU

PUT THE FOOTBALL FIELD?" HE REPLIED THAT IT MIGHT BE PUT IN AUSTRALIA AND EXPLAINED THAT THIS ATOMIC WASTE IS VALUABLE AND COULD BE REPROCESSED AND SOLD PROFITABLY. THE QUESTIONER THEN ASKED WHETHER U.S. POLICY IS "TO USE AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL RESOURCES, PROCESS THEM, SELL THE BEST PARTS, AND GIVE AUSTRALIA BACK THE RUBBISH?" HOSMER EMPHASIZED THAT THAT IS NOT HIS VIEW.

5. NEVERTHELESS IT WAS PERHAPS INEVITABLE THAT THE PRESS PICKED ON THIS SINGLE EXCHANGE AT THE END OF WHAT HAD BEEN A REMARKABLY INFORMATIVE AND FRIENDLY CONFERENCE. NEWSPAPER HEADLINES TELL THE STORY: THE AUSTRALIAN - "U.S. IDEA TO MAKE AUSTRALIA AN ATOMIC DUMP"; DAILY TELEGRAPH - "NUCLEAR RUBBISH DUMP - THAT'S AUSTRALIA"; THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD - "AUSTRALIA ATOM DUMP - U.S. CONGRESSMAN'S PLAN FOR DISPOSAL OF WASTE". IN ADDITION, THE AUSTRALIAN EDITORIALIZED ON MONDAY, JAN 14, UNDER THE TITLE "THE GRAND TRASH CAN", SARCASTICALLY EXPRESSING APPRECIATION FOR HOSMER'S SUGGESTION AND POINTING OUT THAT MR. CONNOR MIGHT HAVE MADE A DEAL WHEREBY AUSTRALIA WOULD TAKE AMERICAN NUCLEAR WASTE AND "SEND ITS OWN WASTE PRODUCT, WRECKED CARS, RAW WASTE, BEER CANS AND BROKEN BOTTLES, AND DUMP THEM IN SOME ARID EYESORE CALLED THE GRAND CANYON."

6. COMMENT: APART FROM THE UNFORTUNATE PRESS COVERAGE OF THIS ONE POINT REGARDING WASTE PRODUCT, I BELIEVE THE HOSMER VISIT IN SYDNEY WAS A PLUS. SEVERAL OF THE
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AUSTRALIAN OFFICIALS, SUCH AS CHAIRMAN OF THE AAEC BOSWELL, AND AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN TO WHOM I HAVE TALKED EXPRESSED GREAT APPRECIATION FOR HOSMER'S ELUCIDATION OF THE PROBLEMS OF NUCLEAR ENERGY AS SEEN FROM THE U.S. THE PUBLICITY ON THE WASTE PROBLEM, WHILE UNFORTUNATE, WAS TO SOME EXTENT OVER-SHADOWED BY THE MORE PROLIFIC PUBLICITY ON DEFENSE MINISTER BARNARD'S SUCCESSFUL TRIP TO THE U.S. AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS EMBARRASSMENT REGARDING THE LEAK OF DIPLOMATIC CABLES (SEE REF B). WHILE WE MAY FROM TIME TO TIME BE REMINDED THAT AUSTRALIA REFUSES TO BE A DUMPING GROUND FOR NUCLEAR WASTE, IT IS PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT MINISTER CONNOR IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH HOSMER, AS REPORTED BY AMEMBASSY CANBERRA (SEE REF C) "REGISTERED REAL INTEREST IN CONGRESSMAN HOSMER'S SUGGESTION OF TIE-IN BETWEEN PERMANENT DISPOSAL AND REPROCESSING".

7. FULL TEXT OF PRESS CONFERENCE AND COPIES OF PRESS COVERAGE BEING POUCHED BY AIRGRAM. HANNAH

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